

Testimony by The Hon. Carol Ann Campbell before the Committee on House Administration.

Thank you Chairman Brady and distinguished members of the Committee on House Administration for joining us here in the City of Philadelphia.

You have come here and asked us to talk about a very important subject: Impediments to Voter Enfranchisement. This is a matter in which I know a great deal about. For more than 15 years, I have served as the Chairwoman of the African-American Ward Leaders of Philadelphia. Our organization represents more than 900,000 African American residents in the City of Philadelphia. Our role is traditional – we organize, mobilize and inform voters in our communities about their choices on Election Day.

This is no small task.

It is no small task because far too often government hinders – not help – the working men and women of our community in their effort to exercise their God-given right to vote, and participate in their Democracy.

I believe there are three principle impediments to voter enfranchisement:

First, we face impediments to actually voting through an emerging pattern of voter ID requirements, prohibiting same day voter registration, having Election Day be a work day, and prohibitions on felons voting. We face techniques and devices used to keep our votes from being counted after they

have been cast. The saga of the 2000 Presidential Election, the drama of voting in Ohio in 2004, and the unresolved matter of the 13th Congressional District in Florida are all clear examples of this problem.

Second we face restrictive ballot access laws – intimidating petition requirements, inconsistent application of election law, confusing financial disclosure forms - that reduce the number of candidates allowed on the ballot. Voters have fewer candidates to choose among for almost all public offices today than voters did a hundred years ago. This problem is further compacted by the disproportionate influence of money in this process. The vast majority of the voices people hear speaking on issues are the voices of money. We don't have free and fair elections if voters don't get to hear the voices of candidates without money. We need public forums where all candidates have equal opportunities to speak.

Third, with over 100 beautiful languages spoken in this city, we face a language barrier for those who have not learned English as their native tongue. This also applies to men and women with different physical abilities. Committing more financial and personal resources to expanding the accessibility of polling places must be a high priority of government at every level.

I have been involved in dozens and dozens of elections. My knowledge on these matters is seconded only by my passion for them. I believe so strongly that if government knowingly disenfranchises one voter, we have failed as a Democracy.

I am so grateful for your presence here today, and the important work that you continue to do these matters. I am happy to answer to any questions you may have.